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MAYOR MITCHEL AND HIS WORK

BY THE EDITOR

“THERE is no denying,” wrote James Bryce in 1893, “that the government of cities is the one conspicuous failure of the United States. In New York the political vices (extravagance, corruption and mismanagement) have revealed themselves on the largest scale. They are ‘gross as a mountain, open, palpable’ . . . That the good citizens of New York should continue to rivet on their necks the yoke of a club which is almost as much a business concern as one of their own dry-goods stores, by dividing forces which, if united, would break the tyranny of the last forty years,—this indeed seems strange, yet perhaps no stranger than other instances of the power of habit, of laziness, of names and party spirit. In such a policy of union, and in the stimulation of a keener sense of public duty rather than in further changes of the mechanism of government, lies the best hope of reform. . . . The one supreme remedy is to strike at the root of the evil by arousing the conscience of the better classes, both rich and poor, and by holding up to them a higher ideal of civic life.”

The truth of the indictment, when drawn, was generally recognized; so, too, was the remedy suggested as bearing the only hope of regeneration; and yet a full twenty years elapsed before it was applied. True, the reaction of dismay and disgust at the shocking Van Wyck régime produced the election of Seth Low as Mayor, but however admirable as a citizen Mr. Low proved unequal to his task and was rejected at the end of a single term. His successor, Mr. George B. McClellan, equally worthy, was elected as a Tammany Democrat and, strive as earnestly as he might and did, he could not break the bonds of partisan obligations; nor could the erratic Gaynor who followed him. So it came about

that 1913 became the year of the Great Experiment,—the year in which the “policy of union” hoped for by Mr. Bryce was achieved in fact and Mr. John Purroy Mitchel, as an unpartisan candidate for Mayor, received from “the better classes, both rich and poor,” a plurality of 124,000.

It was the last, despairing gasp of a disheartened citizenry. Failure of the new administration inviting reaction such as followed that of Mr. Low could spell nothing else and nothing less than enforced reconciliation of six million souls to continuance in the government of their mighty municipality of “the one conspicuous failure of the United States.” It is not too much to say that, in its inevitable effect upon the ideals of other cities throughout the land no less than upon its own, the administration of Mayor Mitchel has been the most critical, as in our judgment it has been the most notable, in the annals of American municipalities.

The chief points in the remarkable record have been summarized by a competent observer as follows:

1. Under the Mitchel administration, New York City has achieved substantial non-partisan government.

2. Thanks to this government, law and order are better preserved than ever before.

3. Thanks to this government, New York is in process of being made an infinitely better place to live and to work in.

4. Thanks to this government, New York City was adequately prepared to meet conditions created by our entrance into the European War.

Point 1. It was only twenty years ago when Richard Croker took Robert A. Van Wyck—just elected Mayor—to Lakewood and handed to him a list of Tammany district leaders and workers who were to be rewarded by appointments to city office or by the receipt of city contracts. Today, there is no boss, no machine and no political party running the city. On the contrary, its affairs are conducted by responsible elected officials. In the field of executive administration, the Mayor is largely supreme; in the Board of Estimate, decisions are reached through the meeting of minds. Until Mr. McAneny retired, the three most important members of the Board of Estimate were, of course, the Mayor, the Comptroller and the President of the Board of Aldermen. Of these, the first and the last were Democrats, the second a Republican. The decisions of the Board of Estimate are practically outside of party lines.

The heads of departments have been appointed by the Mayor for personal competence. Most of them have had especially valuable training for their work, as Woods for Police, Emerson and Gold-

water for Health, Miss Davis and Lewis for Corrections, Kingsbury for Charities and Fetherston for Street Cleaning.

But when Mayor Mitchel took office, there was no shakeup of the city's administrative machinery for political reasons. Thus, Lawson Purdy remained at the head of Taxes and Assessments; Murphy at the Tenement House Department; Haag—a Tammany Democrat—remained Secretary of the Board of Estimate; Nelson P. Lewis remained as Chief Engineer of the Board of Estimate, and Harry P. Nichols as Chief of the Bureau of Franchises of the Board of Estimate.

Commissioner Keogh was carried over from Mayor Gaynor's Civil Service Commission, and the experience of Mayor Gaynor's secretary, Robert Adamson, was utilized in the Fire Department. Thus, New York City is receiving the services of experienced officials and securing a continuity of skilled administration which was unheard of even a few years ago. This benefit proceeds directly from the ideals of non-partisanship and good government which are the *raison d'être* of the Fusion movement.

As a result of keeping good men in office, and of making new appointments for fitness a new and vital spirit has animated departmental administration. The days of the leisurely chair warmer who earned his salary by political activity are gone. The great working forces of city departments are no longer content to do a minimum amount of work according to the ancient customs or methods of the particular department. The objects of public service are not only seen more clearly, but more vividly, and methods are under a constant test in the light of their contributions toward the objects of public service.

So we have the unusual spectacle of greatly expanding work, increased efficiency and substantial economy going hand in hand for practically the first time in the city's history, at any rate, since the formation of the greater city by consolidation in 1897. It is generally conceded that Mayor McClellan's second administration (1906-1910) was abler and more public spirited than his first administration. We owe to McClellan's second administration the institution of the budget system. Nevertheless, during the four years from 1906-1910, the current administrative expense of the city increased at the rate of over 9 per cent per annum. During Mayor Gaynor's administration (1910-1914) the Fusion forces controlled the Board of Estimate through the Comptroller, the president of the Board of Alderman and the presidents of the Boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx. They held the purse strings tighter and brought the average annual increase for the city's current administrative expense down to slightly over 2 per cent.

The first two years of the Mitchel administration (1914-1915) brought about an actual decrease of over two per cent per annum, so that in 1916 the administrative departments were running for

over three million dollars less than in 1914, while at the same time furnishing vastly increased service. In the budget of 1917 some of these savings were used for additional policemen and firemen, and for deserved salary increases, but still leaving a current administrative economy of about \$1,500,000 for 1917 over 1914.

Point 2. The spirit and achievements just outlined are well illustrated in the police department. New York City is certainly a cleaner and safer city than for many, many years,—thanks to intelligent and able police administration. The public does not realize, however, and must constantly be told, how little the best police commissioner can accomplish except with the backing of the right kind of Mayor. Perhaps the biggest single fact in present day police administration is that there is no side door nor back door to police administration through political influence or the Mayor's office. The police commissioner is actually what he ought to be,—the real head of the department. Policemen are not put upon charges, nor transferred, nor detailed to easy lines of duty as the result of political or personal suggestion.

Under the influence of this really square deal, the force has responded with marked *esprit de corps*. Through weekly conferences with his captains and inspectors, the police commissioner has produced a spirit of competition in the efficient performance of police duty, which has reacted upon the members of the force generally.

The tremendous service rendered to the city by this improvement can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. For instance, murders have actually decreased from 286 in 1913 to 246 in 1915. Bomb outrages have decreased from 151 in 1913 to 45 in 1915. The illegal drug traffic has been attacked vigorously—1,978 arrests having been made in 1915 as against only 512 in 1913. While gangs are undoubtedly still in existence, their activities have been greatly curtailed. The proof of this statement, however, must be found in the decrease of serious crimes, as there are no reliable statistics upon gangs *per se*. In 1915 the police secured convictions in almost 79 per cent of their cases,—the highest record in the history of the department.

Particular activity has been directed against organized vice. Open solicitation on the streets has been prosecuted so relentlessly as to be exceedingly rare. While gambling and disorderly houses may exist for short periods of time, the warfare against them is unrelenting, and it is impossible for them to stay unmolested in any place long enough to make it profitable. In addition, a vigorous war has been carried on against the loosely organized system which constituted the supply branch of organized vice. Thus, in 1915 the police department secured convictions for white slavery in 59 cases—more than had been secured in the entire previous history of the department.

Point 3. All intelligent men today realize that they cannot make a great modern city a civilized place to live in, and permit it to be developed by purely selfish and private forces. The modern city can be made civilized only by fixing its street systems and its rapid transit on grounds of public concern. Even when this is achieved, the object will be frustrated unless private building can likewise be made to serve the same public objects which dictated the layout of streets and the development of rapid transit facilities.

To the present Fusion administration, New York City owes the most important single contribution to its future ever made. The zoning resolution of July 25, 1916, is the biggest accomplishment in American city planning. For each of three classes of regulations, the city is divided into numerous zones, in each of which all possible regard is had for the existing developing. The three regulations govern the height of buildings, the area of buildings and the uses to which buildings may be put. The height of every building hereafter erected in New York City must bear a definite relation to the width of the street on which it is located. In most of Manhattan, a building may be one and one half times the width of the street; in a considerable part of the Bronx, one and one-quarter the width of the street, and over large areas of Brooklyn and Queens only one time the width of the street. This means a tremendous conservation of light and air for the future as well as a safeguard against hideous congestion which would take an enormous toll of human life.

The second set of restrictions limit the area of a lot which may be occupied, and insure on an average the retention of about one-quarter of the lot area for purposes of light and air. (In the detached residence sections of Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx, about two-thirds of the lot area is kept vacant.) The third set of restrictions govern the uses of buildings. In a residence district, there may be only residences; in a business district, there may be either residences or business, with only so much manufacturing as is incidental to the business. In unrestricted areas, anything may be built, but these are, of course, located along lines of transportation which insure a predominant industrial use.

So far as possible, the streets around the small neighborhood parks of the city have been restricted to residence use, thus insuring that these parks will always be the sustaining hearts of little residence neighborhoods. These, in time, will effect a very considerable influence on rapid transit difficulties by producing diversified traffic. It is evident that a much more orderly development of the city will ensue; that the various property, residence, business and industrial portions of the city will each assume very much greater stability; and that by reason of increased provision for light and air, living and working conditions in New York City will, ten and twenty years hence, be infinitely better than ever before.

There has been a substantial improvement in tenement house conditions, owing not only to the competition of better new tenements with older ones, but also to more vigorous enforcement of the housekeeping provisions of the tenement house law. Rubbish is kept out of halls and cellars; hallways are kept better painted, better cleaned and better lighted.

The Health Department has appreciated the fact that the final protection of the public health depends upon a general understanding of the laws of healthful living. Thus,—while requiring all milk to be pasteurized, extending the number of milk stations, increasing the medical examinations of school children and making vigorous efforts to improve conditions in hazardous trades—it has put its chief emphasis upon public health education. In elevated or subway stations, posters are put out by the Health Department showing how the death rate varies with the amount of fresh air used. In Winter, when more windows are closed, the death rate is highest. As we approach Summer with more and more windows being opened, the death rate steadily declines. With the closing of windows on the approach of Fall and Winter, the death rate again steadily rises. This is merely an example of the methods used to teach the a b c of right living to the people of the city.

The Street Cleaning Department is, of course, only a branch of municipal sanitation. The department has been put upon a new basis of efficiency and the streets are cleaner than they have been in years. There has been a tremendous increase in the use of water. All paved streets are frequently washed, and in the more congested or more traveled portions, are flushed every night. A model street cleaning district has been established in which every known mechanical device is thoroughly tested before its use is extended to the city as a whole.

Through the substitution of motor apparatus, and a better technical training, the fire fighting ability of the Fire Department has been greatly increased; but the department has put its main emphasis upon preventing fires rather than on putting them out after they have started. The bureau of fire prevention has reached the highest point in effective work as can be partially judged from the fact that the per capita fire loss for the year 1915 was the lowest in the history of the city.

There has been a great increase in recreation facilities; thus, playgrounds have been increased from 49 in 1913 to 108 in 1915; athletic fields from 28 to 34; skating ponds from 15 to 30; indoor recreation centers from 2 to 8; probably the best index of increased facilities and increased use of facilities is found in the fact that for such use there were issued in 1913 about 24,000 permits; in 1915 nearly 65,000 permits were issued.

Closely allied with this has been a great expansion in the use of school buildings after school hours. Not only are hundreds of

school buildings used for election purposes, but they are used for recreation centers, for neighborhood associations and for all sorts of neighborhood activities. On the lower East side, a labor university is conducted in one of the public schools each evening by labor men.

The city no longer considers it an object of no concern that persons willing and able to work are out of employment. Not only did the Mitchel administration grapple with the hard conditions of the year 1914 with an emergency committee, but it established a system of employment bureaus which have been steadily expanding their usefulness.

Point 4. Beginning a year and a half ago, steps were taken to train the police force as a military body. A military training camp was established at Fort Wadsworth, Staten Island, and the police were accustomed to acting efficiently in larger units than ever before. In this, of course, there was no expectation that the police force would act as a defending army but there was the possibility that it would have to meet disturbances beyond all normal size.

To take the place of the police when subject to such call and to supplement generally, the Home Defense League was formed. This now comprises some 25,000 citizens who are trained in the fundamentals of street policing, and who volunteer their services. Mr. Alexander M. White of Brooklyn has been made a Deputy Police Commissioner in charge of Home Defense League work. This has been an extraordinarily successful organization.

A study was made of various emergencies which might arise in case the United States got into war and plans were worked out in advance for protecting water supply, rapid transit, telephone plants and the other various nerve centers of city life.

At about the time that the above preparations were made, the Mayor appointed a Committee on National Defense. This committee has studied the method and defects of mobilizing the National Guard and arrived at the conclusion that selective conscription was a proper way to organize an army, and both the Mayor and this committee vigorously supported this proposal. On the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Germany, this committee instituted a loyalty pledge to which about 1,000,000 signatures were secured.

Since the Declaration of War, this committee has conducted every possible activity to secure enlistments for the regular army and navy and for the national guard, and has also been the medium for transmitting to the national government offers of volunteer assistance and of property for the national use.

Early recognizing the importance of food supplies, the Mayor appointed a Food Supply Committee. Originally this committee concentrated its efforts upon trying to secure adequate legal power to establish an efficient system of wholesale terminal markets. Fail-

ing in this, the committee co-operated with the commission appointed by the Governor in the passage of the Wicks bill. Sufficient private funds were raised to enable it to buy and sell staple articles of food in sufficient quantity to affect their price and supply for the City of New York market. The city government itself, through the Board of Estimate, asked from the legislature the power to buy and sell food at cost which the legislature declined to grant.

Through the Department of Health, Bellevue and Allied Hospitals, the Department of Charities and a special committee appointed by the Mayor, emergency hospital preparations have been made and hospital units placed in training for army service.

An intelligent effort has been made to co-ordinate all physical public works within the city so as to prevent various public contracts from unwisely competing with each other. An order of urgency on such work has been established. The most important work is being fully prosecuted while less important work is being temporarily withheld. If at any time the National Government needs a certain amount of day labor in New York City, the municipal officers know exactly the additional public contracts which can best be suspended and which would release the necessary amount of labor for government work.

All of the above has been done hand in hand with careful administration, cutting costs, increasing income, standardizing salaries, subjecting contract work to more careful supervision, and with more far sighted planning on the part of the Board of Estimate than ever before. And while these things have been done, more dock space has been added to the port of New York than in any prior administration; subway construction has been actively prosecuted, and various portions of the subway system put into operation; and the city has practically ceased using its credit for non-revenue producing public improvements. As a result of direct state taxes and interest during the construction upon docks and subways, plus the greatly added annual expense of paying for non-revenue producing improvements out of current funds, the city budget during the Mitchel administration has been rising and will continue to rise for some years to come. Nevertheless, it must be apparent that no administration has ever exercised so strong or so intelligent a direction of the city's activity nor demonstrated an equal ability to place courageous public financing and sound administrative methods at the human service of the people of the City of New York.

Although written by one who is, with good reason, proudly friendly to Mayor Mitchel and his administration, this summary is to the best of our knowledge a fair presentation of both purposes and consequences. Mr. Mitchel has been actuated by no better intent to serve the great city well and truly than that which possessed Mr. Low, Mr. Mc-

Clellan or even perhaps Mr. Gaynor; it is to his keener insight and wider comprehension that his larger measure of success is attributable. Mr. Bryce himself could not have marked a sharper, clearer or sounder distinction than that voiced by the Mayor at the close of his first year of service.

"There are," he declared, "two theories on which a fusion may be based, the non-partisan and the multi-partisan. The multi-partisan theory contemplates a parceling out of patronage to the parties in proportion to the value of their support. The non-partisan theory demands fitness, qualifications and experience first and a recognition of party service only when the party can produce candidates who conform to the highest standards of efficient government. This difference is what distinguishes the mere temporary federation of political elements effected for the capturing of a number of public offices, from a genuine citizens' movement inspired by a determination to improve the character and standards of government. The interests of the citizenship in city affairs are often opposed to the interests of party, and an administration which is pledged to observe only the former must often find itself compelled to disregard the latter. The present administration recognizes its direct responsibility to the citizenship. It has sought to deal equitably with the parties under the principle that I have laid down, but it is not responsible to them nor they for it. Its accounting will not be to them, but to the people of the city."

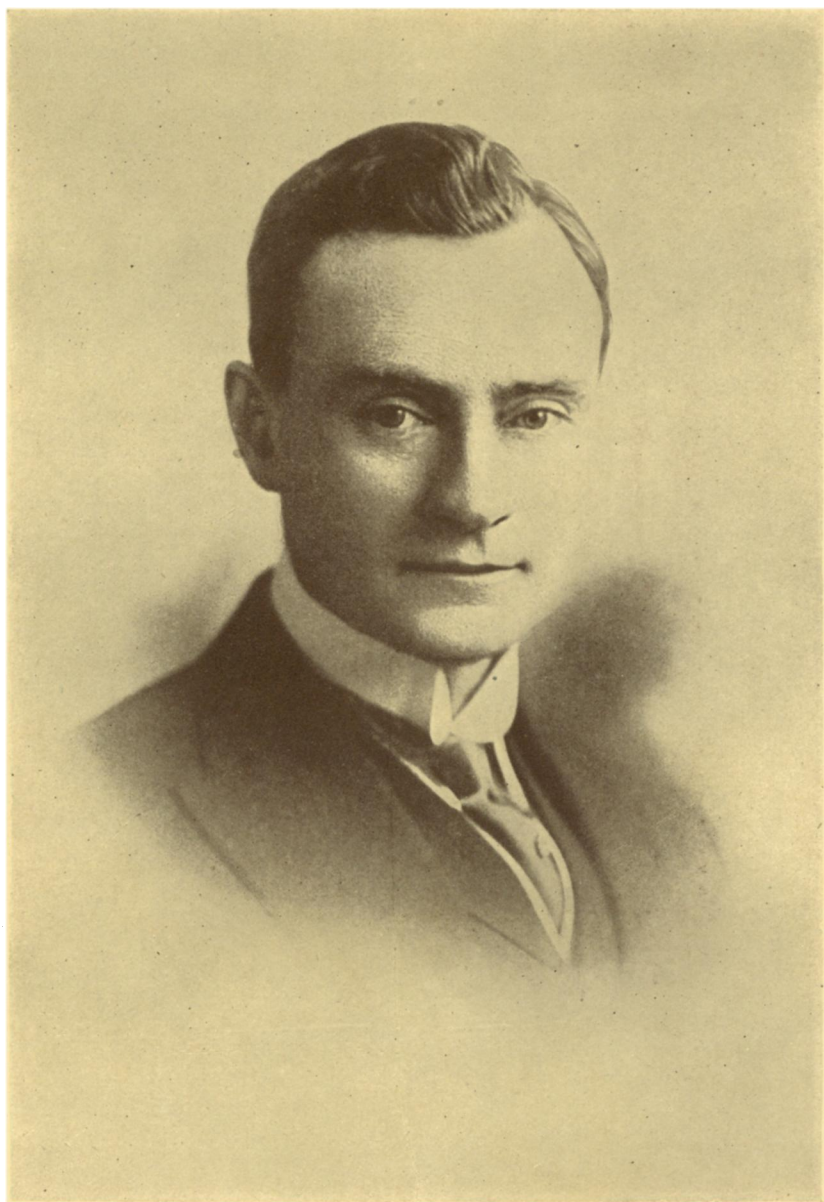
Here is the crux of the whole matter. "Unpartisan," to our mind, would express more exactly than the innocuous "non-partisan" the differentiating thought, but the line of cleavage is plain enough. Even so, the correctly formed theory would have broken into a thousand pieces and the Great Experiment would have proved a ghastly failure but for the quality of the man himself. Very early in his official career Mayor Mitchel convinced the people of his intelligence, his sincerity, his courage and his determination to resolve his words into deeds. To that circumstance is due the most significant fact that the recent shocking exhibition of impotence and stupidity of the police in connection with the Cruger case evoked no mighty outbreak of popular wrath, as in the past, but induced rather a quiet thanking of God that the city had an administration above suspicion, free to detect and punish all official offenders because it was

obligated to the shielding of none and sure to conceal nothing because it had nothing to hide. A more striking tribute to the integrity of a government springing directly from the confidence of the people never was paid—especially upon the eve of an election, upon which vultures of all grades, sizes and stripes have fixed their glittering eyes.

While the complete disappearance of “graft” and political corruption must be regarded as the most noteworthy effect of the Mayor’s endeavors, hardly less gratifying is the pride of the city in the Mayor himself engendered by his exceptional poise, as notably illustrated by the personal dignity and grace of speech which characterized his recent welcoming of our distinguished guests from abroad. Great municipalities are proverbially no more grateful than great republics, but even New York, as a matter of preference, appreciates the honor of being represented by an American gentleman.

Whatever, then, may be the personal inclination of Mr. Mitchel, we cannot doubt that the citizens of New York will demand continuance in service of himself and his equally efficient and experienced aids, and that their call will be heeded as a summons from the people to public duty.

THE EDITOR.



JOHN PURROY MITCHELL